DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 163 663 95 EA 011 163

TITLE Educational Vouchers. The Best of ERIC, Number 41.
INSTITUTION Oregon Univ., Eugene. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Dec 78
CONTRACT 400-78-0007
NOTE 5p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403 (free)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Annotated Bibliographies; *Educational Alternatives; *Education Vouchers; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; Parent Participation; Program Descriptions
IDENTIFIERS Alum Rock (California); Houston (Texas); Magnet Schools

ABSTRACT

This annotated bibliography highlights eleven publications on educational vouchers. Issues discussed include several voucher systems, the value of increased parental decision-making, and nonvoucher systems of educational options. The authors included in the bibliography also discuss how vouchers may promote freedom of choice but reduce equality of education, effects of a voucher system on racial segregation, and the participation of sectarian schools in voucher programs. Several entries focus on the history and structure of the Alum Rock (California) voucher project and attempt to evaluate it. Houston's magnet school program is also highlighted. All items are entries in the ERIC system. (JM)

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Number 41 December 1978

The Best of ERIC

Clearinghouse on Educational Management

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ED163663

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Educational Vouchers

1 **Bridge, R. Gary.** "Parental Decision Making in an Education Voucher System." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, Chicago, April 1974. 32 pages. ED 098 656.

Parental decision-making is the key to any voucher system. But do parents wish to make decisions about their children's education? If so, what areas do they wish to influence? And what are the factors that influence their decisions?

Bridge here explores these questions and their answers, using data from two parent surveys conducted at Alum Rock (California) in the falls of 1972 and 1973. In addition, he discusses the more fundamental question of whether educational decisions made by parents are necessarily the best for their children.

Generally, parents whose children were participating in the voucher program showed an interest in exerting influence on school decision-making. This tendency increased both with the educational level of the parents and with their level of awareness of the voucher program.

Initially, the factor that most influenced school choice was the school's location. During the experiment's first year, 90 percent of the children attended the school nearest their home. But the influence of location decreased after the first year, whereas curriculum, a child's satisfaction with a program, and a child's test scores increased in importance.

But what of the quality of parental decisions? On the one hand, parents know a great deal about their children's interests and abilities, and they presumably know what they want for their children. On the other hand, experienced professional educators should know how different children respond to different instructional settings. The problem, concludes Bridge, is to bring together these two sources of information.

2 **Cohen, David K.,** and **Farrar, Eleanor.** "Power to the Parents? The Story of Education Vouchers." *Public Interest,* 48 (Summer 1977), pp. 72-97. EJ 165 160.

The original goal of the Alum Rock voucher experiment was to promote competition in the educational sector by giving parents a choice of the schools their children attend. The roles of teachers, administrators, and parents were to be reconceptualized and parents were to be the big winners. In reality, however, "the role that had initially been conceived as a reform was progressively redefined until it was hardly distinguishable from long-established and accepted practice."

For example, after the first year's trial, teachers and administrators insisted on enrollment limits for each school, so that more-appealing schools would simply spill over into less-appealing schools. California legislation passed in 1973 finally allowed public moneys to flow to nonpublic schools, but only to schools under the exclusive control of local authorities. Moreover, participating schools were subject to district rules concerning curriculum, teacher certification, and discipline.

The principals of the participating schools "vigorously resisted publishing comparative information that might encourage competition among schools." Parents did not take advantage of their opportunity to gain power, preferring their traditional roles instead.

The voucher plan *did* allow more curricula diversity and parental choice to develop in the district, and it also increased teachers' abilities to choose and design their own instructional settings. But these improvements were *not* due to competition, the authors emphasize, but instead were the results of decentralization and the institution of minischools in the participating schools.

The disparities between proposed theory and existing reality are amply pointed out in this interesting article. In the one actual test of the voucher system at Alum Rock, "local forces tended to overwhelm federal priorities." Included in this wide-ranging article is a history of the development of the voucher concept.

3 **Coons, John E.,** and **Sugarman, Stephen D.** *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1978. 253 pages.

Can an education voucher system uphold both the socialist ideal of equality and the libertarian ideals of freedom of choice and marketplace competition? The authors believe so and in this wide-ranging book outline their voucher proposal—the Quality Choice Model (QCM)—that would allow greater diversity in education while assuring each family equal power in choosing schools. In addition, the authors examine the issues involved in instituting a system of family choice in education, address head on the objections to such systems, outline several proposed voucher plans, and call for greater experimentation with family choice models.

Under the QCM (formerly called "family power equalizing" by the authors), participating schools could charge whatever tuition they wished within a stipulated range (for example, $800 to $2,500 per year). Each family would choose a school (either public or private) for their child according to both that school's tuition level

and the school's approach to education.

In return, each individual family would pay according to the tuition level of the school it picked and according to the family income level. Thus, wealthier families would pay more for the same level school, yet all families would have a choice of levels, and all would pay more for access to higher levels. Experimentation and monitoring would eventually lead to a precise equalizing system.

The authors note that precedents for family choice systems exist in the food stamp program and the Medicaid program. Only public education remains compulsory and standardized. Experience with choice systems has also been gained through the G.I. Bill and the Alum Rock voucher experiment.

A common criticism of voucher systems is that they would promote segregation. But the authors believe that "integration might become more successful as families think relatively less about race and more about teachers, curriculum, and style." They note that no serious study has been done to test this idea, but a few open enrollment plans have led to increased integration.

Most of this book is devoted to a discussion of the design of the instruments of choice, such as admissions policies, consumer information, mechanisms for fair selection, transportation, teacher certification, transfer policies, regulation of competition, and the governance and formation of schools of choice. In addition, the authors deal at length with the philosophical issues of equality, freedom of choice, and the child's best interests.

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4 **Fantini, Mario.** "Options for Students, Parents, and Teachers: Public Schools of Choice." *Phi Delta Kappan,* 52, 9 (May 1971), pp. 541-43. EJ 039 982.

"Making every parent the decision maker for his family's education," states Fantini, "is a significant stage beyond electing representatives to decide what kind of education makes the most sense for the majority in the locality." The present majority-rule system fosters uniformity, he continues, while a system of choice would maximize variation.

But creating a system of choice does not necessarily require the philosophical and administrative acrobatics demanded by most current voucher theories. Instead, a variety of educational options can be developed within the public school system through what might be called an "internal voucher system."

Such a system requires only that a district give up its one-model approach to education and allow a variety of optional approaches to be implemented in response to community desires. For example, a district might offer several options in its elementary schools ranging from a traditional back-to-basics school to a Montessori school.

A big advantage of a choice educational system is that it "starts where the public school system and the clients are and develops from that point." Another is that it is likely to enhance the professional satisfaction of educators.

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5 **Flygare, Thomas J.** "An Abbreviated Voucher Primer." *Inequality in Education,* 15 (November 1973), pp. 53-56. EJ 089 455.

The four voucher plans discussed here by Flygare are all designed to increase freedom of choice in education, yet each differs significantly from the others.

In Milton Friedman's plan, each child would receive a voucher that could be used to pay the full cost of a public or private education, or part of the cost of a private education. Competitive pressure alone would improve and diversify education. Critics argue that socioeconomic segregation would increase if such an unregulated plan were adopted.

The voucher plan proposed by Theodore Sizer of Harvard would give different size vouchers to families according to their incomes,

poverty families would receive large vouchers while families with the national average income or above would receive no voucher. Thus the poor child holding a large voucher would become a desirable client for public and private schools.

Under Christopher Jenck's plan (on which the Alum Rock experiment was based), each child would receive a voucher, but disadvantaged children would receive larger, compensatory vouchers. Schools would be required to accept all applicants until full and would be required to be racially representative. Jencks believes the plan would both increase spending for education and help schools become more racially and economically mixed.

The "Family Power Equalizing" model of John Coons "represents a major departure" from the other voucher plans, says Flygare. Each family would pay according to both the tuition level of the school chosen (there would be four levels) and the family income level. Thus, the amount of money spent on a child's education "would be determined by the financial effort relative to income that a family is willing to make." Critics argue that children who need better schools are precisely those whose parents rank education as a low priority.

Flygare also briefly discusses two important issues that any voucher plan must deal with: the propensity of the plan to promote racial and socioeconomic segregation, and the church-state conflict when aid is given to parochial schools.

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6 **Jencks, Christopher.** "Giving Parents Money for Schooling: Education Vouchers." *Phi Delta Kappan,* 52, 1 (September 1970), pp. 49-52. EJ 029 040.

In March 1970, the Center for the Study of Public Policy, of which Jencks was codirector, completed a feasibility study for educational voucher plans that was funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). When OEO announced in May that it wanted to fund a voucher plan experiment, considerable liberal opposition developed. This article, though dated, provides both an explanation of the proposed experiment from the principal architect of the OEO plan, and his responses to early criticisms of it.

The first step in the voucher experiment would be the establishment, in some community, of an independent Educational Voucher Agency (EVA) that would issue vouchers to the parents of elementary school children. The EVA would also lay down the rules specifying which schools could cash vouchers and which could not and collect and disseminate information about what each school is doing.

The key to success would be the regulations laid down by the EVA. These regulations, explained by Jencks, would assure a child's equal access to every participating school, yet would place minimal constraints on the schools' programs and staffing practices.

One common objection to the voucher system is that it would allow large numbers of profit-oriented firms to enter the educational marketplace, with a resulting increase in hucksterism and mediocre schooling. But Jencks points out that existing private schools, on the average, are just as good as public schools.

Another objection is that the vouchers would be available to children attending Catholic schools. But Jencks replies that the EVA could easily restrict participation to nonsectarian schools. Moreover, the federal Constitution may prohibit this kind of church-state mix. In response to charges that the plan would retard desegregation, Jencks notes that "the courts have repeatedly thrown out voucher systems designed to maintain segregation."

7 **Levinson, Eliot.** "The Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration: Three Years of Implementation. The Rand Paper Series." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, San Francisco, April 1976. 37 pages. ED 122 430.

"After three years of operation," states Levinson, "the basic changes envisioned prior to initiation of the [Alum Rock voucher] experiment have not occurred as planned." In this paper, Levinson both explores the reasons for the attenuation of voucher theory at Alum Rock and outlines the history of the voucher program there.

In early 1972, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) had to find a voucher experiment site or lose its funds for the experiment. Five other districts that had conducted feasibility studies (funded by OEO) had refused to proceed for various reasons. Only Alum Rock was left. Thus, to get its foot in Alum Rock's door, the OEO accepted a substantially compromised voucher plan, with the hope that true voucher theory could later be instituted.

The voucher theory components that were finally adopted were implemented sequentially: minischools were emphasized in the first year, budget systems in the second, and program evaluation and parental information in the third. Given the complexity of the situation, this sequential approach was understandable, says Levinson, but the result was that "at no time were all of the components that comprised the voucher system in operation together."

At the time of this three-year report, recentralization had already begun to occur. Teachers and principals were ridding themselves of unpleasant aspects of the voucher system (such as competition for enrollment and increased responsibilities for budgeting) while retaining some of the advantages (such as minischools and participatory decision-making).

In short, the implementation of true voucher theory largely failed at Alum Rock, but the experiment is of interest in its own right as an example of what happens when organizational innovation is attempted in an educational system. Levinson gives one of the better analyses of what happened at Alum Rock during the early years and discusses the many lessons to be learned from the experiment.

8 **Mandel, David.** "Schools on the Market." *Times Educational Supplement* (London), 3181 (May 21, 1976), pp. 20-21. EJ 149 214.

Parents seem to be well-satisfied with the voucher experiment in the Alum Rock (California) school district, particularly regarding the opportunity it gives them to choose their child's school, observes London *Times* correspondent Mandel. In addition, most participating teachers have responded favorably from the start. It is easy to see why: teachers usually work with colleagues who share the same educational philosophy, and they teach students who are there by choice (or at least by their parents' choice). They have acquired greater influence over budgeting, curriculum, and new teacher hiring as well.

Student achievement, Mandel notes, has not changed discernibly at the participating schools. In addition, no hucksterism or increased segregation have developed in the system, as some critics predicted.

In the Alum Rock voucher system, parents receive a voucher worth the average cost of education in the district. If the family is considered disadvantaged, the voucher is of greater value. Participating schools are required to accept all children who apply, as long as space permits. When oversubscribed, the school holds a random drawing for places. Free transportation is provided to all students who need it, and students can transfer schools at any time.

The fourteen participating elementary schools are subdivided into fifty minischools that differ either in teacher style or curriculum emphasis. No private schools have become a part of the experiment, though the original plan called for their inclusion. Thus some observers have concluded that the voucher system was never really tried at Alum Rock and that simple diversity can be created without a voucher system. Mandel argues, however, that a voucher plan allows consumer input that creates a better match between supply and demand.

9 **Pickard, Brent W.,** and **Richards, Donald M.** "Educational Vouchers." *Canadian Administrator*, 15, 4 (January 1976), pp. 1-5. EJ 137 958.

The several model voucher systems that have been proposed share certain common elements. Each assumes that freedom of choice is the ultimate objective, yet each also sees the necessity for a government regulatory agency to both prevent abuses and disburse funds. Each also implies or expresses a belief in a free,

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competitive educational market.

Voucher systems also share the common goal of reducing inequities in the present system of financing education, primarily through provisions that would increase the share of resources available to the disadvantaged. All plans assure each institution enough money to provide programs comparable in cost with present programs, and some plans make it possible for institutions to receive additional funds to "remove the effects of wealth." Such plans, say some proponents of voucher systems, will raise society's total expenditure on education.

The authors note that voucher systems are basically designed "to provide funds for current operating budgets rather than provide capital funds." Thus some proponents have suggested that a loan system be set up alongside the voucher system for the establishment of new schools and facilities.

A major problem with voucher systems is ensuring that individuals make wise educational choices. Students are likely to choose a school because of its advertising or the success of its football team, rather than because of the quality of its educational services. The authors suggest that "it will require a great amount of time and effort before individuals will become wise purchasers of educational services."

Included are a discussion of vouchers in postsecondary education (specifically the G.I. Bill) and the use of vouchers for continuing education programs.

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10 **Premazon, Judith,** and **West, Philip T.** "Requiem or Rebirth? From Voucher to Magnet." *Clearing House*, 51, 1 (September 1977), pp. 38-40. EJ 169 094.

Houston's magnet school concept "embraces the favorable aspects of the voucher system and minimizes or eliminates the principal objections to such a system." For example, the magnet program gives rise to a variety of educational programs, but each program can survive only if it can attract and retain its clients. Parents must decide which, if any, magnet schools their children will attend.

In addition, the authors state that "what was conjectured about discipline in voucher schools has become a reality in the magnet school", that is, discipline problems have nearly disappeared in magnet school settings.

The Houston magnet schools are also maintaining desegregation—each school is required to maintain the court-mandated ethnic mix. Free transportation is offered to all clients in the district, so there is no restriction on choice due to location.

As opposed to voucher systems, the magnet schools do not depend on federal support. The authors admit that per pupil expenditures are greater for students who select magnet programs, but the district has decided that the benefits are worth the extra cost.

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11 **Wortman, Paul M.,** and **St. Pierre, Robert G.** "The Educational Voucher Demonstration: A Secondary Analysis." *Education and Urban Society*, 9, 4 (August 1977), pp. 471-92. EJ 167 001.

Was the Alum Rock voucher experiment a true test of voucher theory? According to the authors, all voucher plans have four common features: parents are totally responsible for school choice, schools are financed only through vouchers, both public and private schools participate, and the resulting free-market system assures the survival of only the best schools.

But in the Alum Rock demonstration, the authors contend, "there was a great deal of slippage in implementing these theoretical constructs." Parents were indeed given a choice of schools, but a school's personnel, particularly the principal, decided whether the school would participate at all. So only some of the district's schools participated, and no private schools participated.

The other elements of voucher theory also experienced "serious erosion" in their implementation. Instead of each school or minischool becoming independent and decentralized, the central office deducted a "payback" fee from each voucher for centralized administrative services. The local teacher organization received an assurance of teacher job security in return for their support of the plan. In short, "the voucher demonstration was reduced to a form of 'open enrollment' or alternative education" instead of a test of a competitive, free-market system in education.

In addition to examining the mismatch between voucher theory and implementation, the authors discuss past analyses of student achievement data and their own recent (1977) reanalysis of those data. Their analysis indicates that a disproportionate number of brighter students enrolled in the innovative, nontraditional minischools. But after the first year, these brighter students were performing at a lower level than their peers in nonvoucher schools. This result, the authors note, is not surprising, considering the "lack of fit between the goals of these nontraditional programs and measures of academic achievement."

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